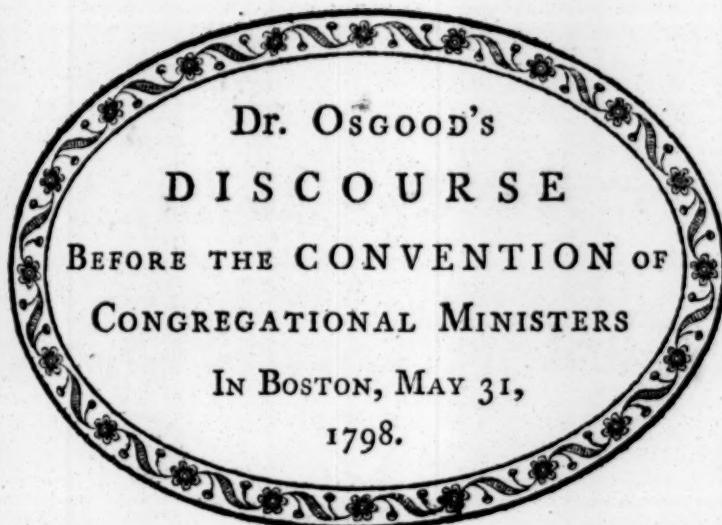


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The signal ADVANTAGES derived to the  
Nations of CHRISTENDOM from their  
RELIGION,

ILLUSTRATED IN A  
**DISCOURSE**  
DELIVERED BEFORE  
THE  
**ANNUAL CONVENTION**  
OF THE  
**CONGREGATIONAL MINISTERS**  
OF  
**MASSACHUSETTS,**  
IN BOSTON, MAY 31, 1798.

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By DAVID OSGOOD, D.D.  
PASTOR of the CHURCH in MEDFORD. 

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1798.

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## MATTHEW xiii. 33.

*ANOTHER PARABLE spake he unto them, The kingdom of Heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

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THROUGH the several parables recorded in this chapter, and indeed generally through the New Testament, *the kingdom of heaven* denotes the gospel dispensation which our Saviour was now, by his personal ministry, introducing and publishing to the world. In the parable now read, and in that immediately preceding, is set forth its gradual progress from a small beginning. Like a grain of mustard seed planted in the earth, and thence springing up and flourishing into one of the greatest of herbs, or like a small portion of leaven buried in a large mass of dough, and silently and insensibly diffusing itself, till the whole lump feels its influence and is brought into a state of fermentation ; so the gospel shall spread and prevail among mankind, and have a most happy effect upon their hearts and lives.

This prediction of its success was seasonably addressed to the disciples for their support and encouragement in the arduous mission on which they were soon to enter. As the ministry of their divine

vine Master drew to a close, the continued publication of his gospel would devolve upon them ; and through their exertions, his cause and interest were to be supported and advanced. But what enterprise, comparably so difficult, had heretofore been attempted by men ? The power and policy of the world, all its civil and religious establishments which had already endured for ages, were in direct opposition to the new religion preached by Christ. After witnessing the general enmity and rage against it as taught by him, after seeing its author despised and rejected of men, and at last, executed upon the cross—what heart could the disciples have for an attempt so apparently desperate ? From such difficulties and dangers they must have shrunk, had they not reposed an unshaken confidence in the promises and predictions of their Lord. To animate them in the work before them, he gave previous assurance, that their labour should not be in vain. How unpromising soever the first reception of the gospel might be, yet its doctrines, once made known to men, would, through the concurring influences of the Holy Spirit, work upon their minds, like leaven in a mass of meal, and continue their transforming influence, till a thorough and permanent change in their sentiments, affections, and pursuits, should be effected. Vast multitudes of the present generation, and of every succeeding generation through the course of many revolving ages, would be thus transformed and renewed in the spirit of their minds through the knowledge of the gospel. Nor should the spread and diffusion of this knowledge be stopped by any obstacles or combination of obstructing causes

causes or agents. In a way as imperceptible, and by means as inexplicable, as the fermentation of leaven, it would extend its influence, and ultimately prevail against all the powers of earth and hell, triumph over them, and gain a permanent establishment on the ruins of all opposing systems, whether of religion or of politics. The import of the parable in the text seems to be of an extent as unlimited as those other prophecies in scripture, which foretel the universal spread of the gospel, and the subjection of all nations to its faith and obedience. The gradual spreading of the leaven through the whole lump intimates, that, sooner or later, the light and influence of the gospel shall be extended over the whole world of mankind. In a sense so general, the prediction has not as yet received its full accomplishment. But the degree in which it has been already fulfilled may be considered as an earnest and pledge of its yet further accomplishment; and while it tends to confirm our faith in the divine origin of this religion, may also serve to encourage and animate our efforts in forwarding its progress.

Near two thousand years have elapsed since its first publication; and, through this whole duration, it hath not ceased to influence a greater or less proportion of mankind. In Judea, where its promulgation began, many thousands were among its first and most zealous converts. The bulk of the Jewish nation indeed, headed by their priests and rulers, were its most violent and inveterate opposers, who, after murdering its author, harrassed even to death every description of his followers; and spreading themselves into foreign cities

cities and countries, whither the persecuted disciples fled, or the apostles itinerated, were the first to stir up the heathen against them, and excite every people and nation to overwhelm them with popular clamour and outrage. As the report of this new institution extended itself in the world, every engine of oppression was put in motion for its ruin. The wit and ridicule of the philosophers, the jealousy and wrath of the priests, the fury of the mob, and the power of the magistrate, were, in all places, exerted for its suppression and extirpation. Vain and ineffectual, however, were all the policy and power of both earth and hell. Amidst this universal opposition, the spiritual leaven was still fermenting, secretly spreading and extending its influence further and further. During the apostolic age, its progress was most rapid. Before the close of the first century, it had reached almost every civilized nation in the world, and through all the provinces of the vast Roman empire began to shake the old establishments of superstition and idolatry. During the lapse of the two following centuries, the gods of antiquity, the national and household deities of Greece and Rome, their complicated mythology, including the associated gods of other countries and nations, their spacious temples, altars and sacrifices, with all their pompous rites and ceremonies—the laboured fictions of ignorance and superstition, but which had been, from time immemorial, the objects of universal reverence and devotion—all these vanished before the spreading light and influence of the gospel, like the shades of night before the beams of the rising day. This mighty revolution brought over to the side of the christian

christian system, the riches, honors, and power of the world.

The new alliance, however, like that of old, between the sons of God and the daughters of men, proved the source of great and dangerous corruptions. From worldly views and motives, men professed themselves the disciples of the gospel. In such hands, this pure and holy religion assumed any shape, and appeared in every gaudy form which happened to please their vain imagination, or coincide with their worldly interest. Much of the superstition and idolatry of ancient paganism was revived afresh, and ingrafted into the institutions of christianity. These corruptions were favoured by the ignorance and darkness which overspread the civilized world on the decline and fall of the great Roman empire. The learning and improvements of former ages being swept away by the inundation of barbarous multitudes, conquering the most populous and fertile provinces of Europe ; the empire of ignorance and barbarism was again extended over the world. During the long period of near a thousand years, the influence of the gospel was obstructed by the continually accumulating rubbish of superstition. Its inspired records, however, were carefully preserved, and by all sects and parties acknowledged and appealed to as the standard of true religion. Nor did it cease, in those dark ages, to produce its happy effects upon a faithful remnant, who kept themselves undefiled amidst the general corruption. In each succeeding age, they appeared as witnesses against the prevailing idolatry and superstition. At the era of the protestant reformation, their testimony attracted the

attention of the public : Discussions and controversies ensued, which roused the dormant faculties of men, broke the shackles with which their understandings had been bound, awakened a spirit of inquiry and enterprise, and produced a general revival of the arts and sciences. From that period to the present, "many have run to and fro, and knowledge has been increased" incomparably beyond all the attainments of the learned ancients.

With the improvements in general science, and in the various arts of civilization, there has been a proportional progress in religious knowledge. The other sciences have, in their turn, lent their aid to forward that of Theology. Men of the first abilities have devoted themselves to the study of the sacred scriptures. Commentaries upon them have been written with great judgment and erudition. Every advantage from the knowledge of profane authors, the reports of travellers, and the researches of antiquaries, has been applied to explain and illustrate their meaning. A degree of success has evidently attended these endeavours. Doubtful passages have been elucidated, and seeming inconsistencies reconciled ; the great doctrines of the gospel have been, in a good measure, cleared of those mystic phrases and scholastic niceties with which they were formerly obscured ; and its moral duties are better defined, more generally understood, and more strongly enforced. The various objections of unbelievers have been satisfactorily answered, and the abundant evidence in favor of its divinity has been collected, arranged, and set in the most convincing light. So full and strong are the arguments

guments advanced in its defence, that the issue of every renewed attack from infidelity has uniformly brought disgrace upon the assailants. It is now the received religion among all the most enlightened nations of the world. Its individual enemies among those nations, while they affect doubts concerning it, pretend not that there is any other religion, bearing the name of revealed, to which we ought to give the preference ; or which indeed has any claim to our belief. Such are the internal and external proofs of christianity, that it recommends itself to all men disposed impartially to examine its credentials, and capable of exercising the powers of reason on moral and religious subjects.

Though the present be indeed an age of uncommon indifference towards all religion, yet it is attended with one advantage among the different sects and persuasions of christians—a spirit of candour and forbearance towards each other, beyond what has appeared at any former period. At length, it begins to be understood, that religion is a concern principally between God and the soul of every man. In many places, the rights of conscience are already acknowledged and respected, and will be so universally in proportion as the other rights of human nature shall be understood and reclaimed from usurpation and tyranny.

Should the improvements in knowledge, by which modern Europe is distinguished, be extended to the other quarters of the world ; with the light of science in general, the light of the gospel will, in all probability, equally progress, till it shall illuminate all the dark corners of the earth. Thus the whole mass of mankind may be brought under the influence

influence of the gospel-leaven ; and the text, in the full extent of its meaning, receive its accomplishment. Several circumstances concur in rendering such an event ultimately not improbable. Nay, when we consider the rapid succession of new discoveries in almost every branch of science, which has continued through the three last centuries—the stable monuments erected for the preservation of these discoveries, and their transmission to posterity—monuments so firm and durable as nearly to preclude the possibility of their being lost, and of another relapse of mankind into their former ignorance—when we take into the account, the continual diffusion of this increased and increasing knowledge among the nations of the earth—the extent in every direction to which it has reached already, and the means of a yet further extension furnished in the commerce of the enlightened nations, now spreading to all quarters of the globe, and tendering its advantages to the remotest tribes and countries, inviting them to a reciprocal intercourse and communication—in these things, doth there not seem to be a train provided for the general illumination of the world ? May we not hope, that Providence is working and adjusting circumstances and events for bringing on the universal melioration of mankind through the knowledge and influence of the gospel ?

It is matter of regret, that there should be any, pretending to the character of philanthropists, in whose view this prospect is not a ground of hope and congratulation. The fact, however, is, that a large proportion of those who, at the present day, set themselves up as the great lights of the world,

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appear to be more than indifferent with respect to the success of christianity. While they are incessantly boasting the advantages of their own philosophy, they are equally eloquent in depreciating any valuable effects to be expected from the general spread of the gospel. In support of their opinion they quote the history of the past and present times, and set before us a frightful picture of the intrigues and immoralities of christian priests, the wild doctrines of visionaries and enthusiasts, the absurd bigotry of the vulgar, the ambition of prelates, the virulence of synods and councils, the cruelty of persecutors, the continual wars among christian princes and nations ; and, on the whole, conclude, that if christianity be not what it is called by the Roman historian, \* a *pernicious superstition*, yet that it is but another species of superstition into which mankind are betrayed through the weakness and credulity of their nature, and that nothing more is to be expected from it than from those other religions which, at times, have prevailed in the world.

But though it should be admitted, that these follies and vices have disgraced the characters of some bearing the name of christians ; yet will it be pretended, that they originated in the principles and precepts of their religion ? Are they not the natural fruit of that general depravity of mankind which it is the design and tendency of the gospel to correct and reform ? If it hath not actually wrought this reformation in all to whom it has been published, yet is it not easy to conceive of causes which may have obstructed its influence ? On a mass of frozen meal, *heaven* itself has no effect,

\* Tacitus.

Moral

Moral causes are yet more uncertain in their operation. What mean of reformation is universally efficacious? *Men may hold the truth in unrighteousness; they may know God, while in works they deny him.* Religion, as well as reason, may fail to control those impetuous motives which hurry them on to the indulgence of their lusts. The gospel is addressed to them as free, rational beings. From their own choice its success must result. It depends upon the manner in which they receive and improve this heavenly blessing. If, instead of conforming to its grand requisition, in *crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts,* they persist, under a christian profession, to make provision for the flesh to fulfil its lusts ; it is plain, that their actions will be the fruit, not of their profession, but of their lusts. While their prevailing disposition is carnal, worldly, and selfish—while avarice, ambition, or voluptuousness has the governing sway in their hearts ; their religion, whatever it may be, together with their reason and learning, and all their other advantages, will be rendered subservient to their predominant views—will be abused in the service of their lusts. Under a management of this sort, the institutions of the Prince of Peace, the doctrines of benevolence itself, may be made a pretence for every species of injustice and oppression, of violence and cruelty, and for wars and fightings. Nor may we suppose, that these evils would be escaped, were this particular pretence wanting. Did they not prevail to as great a degree before the era of christianity as they have done since ? Do they not still prevail among nations and in countries where christianity is not known?

known? In what part of the earth can you find exemption from them? Among what tribe or people can you dwell secure from the fear of them?

Should the period ever arrive, when the gospel shall produce its full effect on each individual in every nation, there will then be no longer internal oppression or external war, nor the ascendancy of any of those passions which imbitter social life and fill the earth with violence. There may be indeed then, as there was in the apostolic age, different persuasions among christians, and controversies on various articles of their common faith; but being conducted with that mutual charity which the gospel, above all things, enjoins upon its votaries, these controversies will occasion little harm, and may produce much good, by promoting inquiry, discussion, and improvement in knowledge; and by keeping up attention to the things of religion, and a concern about them. Then righteousness and peace will fill the earth.

But until the malevolent passions of men shall be thus subdued by gospel-grace, they will continue to produce misery and mischief. Where these passions are, occasions will not be wanting for putting them in motion. They are so frequently predominant, that they give to the affairs of nations their general complexion, and form their most prominent features. From them originate those tornadoes in the moral world, whose paths are marked with ruin, and whose baneful effects, together with their causes and consequences, are the events which principally fill the pages of history. And are these events quoted to the disadvantage and reproach of the gospel? What can be more unfair or unjust?

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On those who believe and obey it, the gospel has, at all times and in every place, a most happy effect. But in vain shall we search the records of history for a detail of these effects. Neither they, nor the usual subjects of them, are of that kind of importance which attracts the notice of the historian. *Christ's kingdom is not of this world, and cometh not with observation.* It consists in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. After these silent qualities of the heart, history makes no inquiry. They rarely find a place in those splendid narrations which set before us the counsels of princes, the intrigues of courtiers, the debates and resolvs of popular assemblies, the conduct of governments towards their subjects and towards one another, the movements and exploits of contending armies, their victories, defeats, and conquests. The principal actors in these scenes, the personages who thus figure upon the great stage of the world, are, for the most part, men of no religion. What have statesmen and heroes, generals and courtiers, to do with christianity ? If it be the popular religion of their country, reasons of state may induce them to profess it, and occasionally make it a pretext for promoting their political views ; but with the knowledge and belief of it, they may give themselves no further concern. It may have no place in their thoughts or affections, and no influence upon their temper or conduct. Other concerns usually fill both their hearts and their heads ; and very different motives and principles are the general spring of their actions.

But while few among the noble and the mighty can be supposed to be under the genuine influence  
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of the gospel, its effect on the subordinate multitudes, over whom these great ones exercise dominion, may be very considerable. In the smaller circles of friendship and neighbourhood, among the various classes of tradesmen, labourers, and husbandmen, on near relations, in private families, and in the hearts and lives of individuals, it may have an influence great and important, beyond all human calculation. In particular ages and countries, this influence has been, no doubt, greater or less, according to the degree in which the gospel has been understood and believed. Where it is the subject of general attention and faith, there, of course, its beneficial influence may be supposed to be the greatest. But where scepticism prevails, or where the simplicity of the gospel is corrupted with a mixture of human inventions, there its influence is unavoidably lessened. It is a melancholy consideration, that through so great a part of Christendom the complete knowledge of it is withheld from the common people, and so much only communicated as their spiritual and civil rulers have condescended to permit ; and that even this is often communicated in forms very different from those in which it is taught in the inspired writings. But under all the disadvantages with which it is, in many places, encumbered, we have reason to believe, that in every country, where it is the received religion, christianity is productive of some good and happy effects. Distinguished examples of eminent virtue and goodness have been exhibited in every country of Christendom. Some of these characters have adorned every age of the christian era. Many of those who have not been effectually

reformed by the gospel, have yet been restrained from various excesses and vices into which their lusts and passions would otherwise have hurried them. The impressions of religion upon loose and giddy minds are not always wholly lost. They often check vice in its career, and set bounds to its progress. They tend to preserve the appearances of virtue in those who are destitute of the reality. They so far influence the irreligious as to induce them to pay some respect to order and decency. They who are bad, might probably be worse, were it not for the restraints of religion : Their rudeness and ferocity are abated by the religious principles in which they have been educated. Nay, in some of them, these principles, though long apparently smothered by the prevalence of vicious propensities, do yet, on the occurrence of circumstances and occasions proper to revive and strengthen them, prove the seeds of a sincere and thorough amendment.

It is certain, that through all the countries of Christendom a change greatly for the better has been effected. Christianity has inspired the inhabitants of those countries with sentiments and opinions more worthy of their rational nature, and furnished their understandings with the knowledge of the most interesting truths. In their state of heathenism, they were universally polytheists, they acknowledged gods many, and worshipped these numerous deities, in some instances, by the most obscene, and in others, by the most cruel and bloody rites ; and so totally ignorant were they of the moral purity and perfection of the true God, that to these fictitious deities, which they had substituted

tuted in his place as the objects of their devotion, they ascribed all the passions and vices which degrade and debase the most profligate characters among men. If a few of their philosophers entertained in speculation sentiments less gross, yet in practice they conformed to the reigning superstition. Instead of attempting to undeceive others, their example tended to strengthen the general delusion. In the view of this their stupid and senseless idolatry, it is impossible not to acknowledge, that in passing from heathenism to christianity, these nations have been brought most emphatically *out of darkness into marvellous light.* In the true knowledge of their Maker, his character, his moral government over them, their accountableness to him, and future expectations from him—in the knowledge of these most important and interesting subjects, common and ordinary christians evidently excel the most learned sages in the Gentile world. This knowledge enlarges and strengthens their minds, and gives them an elevation far superior to what could result from the gross fictions of paganism. As a subject of theory, what other science can vie with christianity? what other speculation is comparably so sublime?

But it ends not in speculation. It is admirably adapted to form the heart and regulate the life. The great conceptions which it gives us of God as a just and righteous Judge, and of ourselves as probationers for eternity, tend to establish in us a persuasion, that in a life of piety and in the practice of virtue we shall find our truest happiness. Thus persuaded, we are encouraged and animated to a patient continuance in well-doing. This course of conduct

conduct is marked out before us, with the utmost precision, in the gospel precepts, and our obedience is prompted by motives the most solemn and energetic suggested in the gospel doctrines. The death of Christ, as the foundation of all our hopes towards God, the frontispiece or principal feature on the gospel scheme, is an event so astonishing, that it tends, above whatever else can be imagined, to awaken a thoughtless race, convince them of the evil of sin and of God's extreme indignation against it, and excite in them a concern to obtain the pardon which has been purchased at such a price. This method of forgiveness, while it relieves our apprehensions under a sense of past guilt, opens to us views of the strictness and sanctity of the divine laws, proper to fill us with the deepest reverence for them, and render us continually circumspect in our behaviour. To such a behaviour we are further incited by an assurance of its being connected with life eternal in Heaven hereafter. This assurance, at once the incitement and the reward of virtue, has a great effect upon present happiness. To good men it is the basis of a hope which enhances all their present enjoyments, assuages their sorrows, bears them up under the trials of life, and comforts them in the agonies of death. From this source, what streams of strong consolation have been continually flowing in upon every successive generation of christians, for their refreshment during the wearisome pilgrimage of their lives, and for their support while passing the valley of the shadow of death?

But while individuals, more than can be numbered, have been made better and happier through the influence of the christian system, we admit, that

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its general effect on the morals and manners of the nations professing it, has not been equal to what might have been hoped. Will any, however, pretend, that it hath not made a distinction between them and the other nations of the world, greatly to the honor of the former? Are not those of our fellow-citizens who have, not long since, escaped from Algerine slavery, sensible of this distinction? What they suffered from the heathen of Africa was the common lot of captives among the nations of Europe previous to their knowledge of christianity. Civilized and polished as were the ancient Greeks and Romans, a savage cruelty marked their conduct in war, and their treatment of captives outraged all the feelings of humanity. If the unfortunate prisoners were not massacred in cold blood, they were subjected to perpetual slavery; and when their numbers were deemed dangerous or cumbersome, recourse was had to the cruel expedient of the Egyptian tyrant. The laws and the customs favoured strongly of inhumanity. So steeled were the hearts of men against the feelings of sympathy and compassion, that they were entertained and gratified in beholding what ought to have been spectacles of horror. Who can think of their gladiatorial shows, and not be astonished at their ferocity? In the language of the apostle, they were *full of murder, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.* To this character of the ancient pagans, is not that of their christianized posterity, in various respects, an agreeable contrast? Though the religion of the latter has not hitherto been sufficiently efficacious to prevent their engaging in war, yet it has humanized their manner of carrying it on,

on, mitigated its calamities, restrained the fury of victors, procured compassion for the vanquished; and so meliorated the sentiments and softened the manners of men, that whatever be cruel or ferocious in public transactions, or in private conduct, is sure to meet the general censure.

Besides their sanguinary spirit, the ancient pagans were addicted to the most detestable lewdness. Setting no bounds to their concupiscence, they gave themselves up to *vile affections*, and indulged desires as abhorrent from nature as shocking to reason and decency. In mahometan and pagan countries, these vices still appear ; but if they be not wholly excluded from Christendom, they are no where countenanced by established law or public usage. Christianity has stamped them with infamy, forced them into obscurity, and set the public opinion strongly against them. On its first publication, it began thus to reform the opinions and purify the morals of its professors ; and it hath continued, in proportion as it has prevailed among any people, to diffuse itself, like leaven, into their laws, their customs, and their manners. It is the acknowledged standard for the regulation of morals ; and has a greater influence than any thing else, in preserving the rectitude of public opinion among all the nations of Christendom. The common people, in general, are guided by it in forming their judgment of what is morally good or evil. Their belief in its future rewards and punishments operates as a most powerful check upon their passions and lusts, over-awes their consciences, and is, in fact, the main principle by which the peace and order of society are preserved. It gives to men their

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surest hold one on another. An oath, the last and greatest pledge of veracity, derives its whole strength and solemnity from this persuasion. It supplies, in a measure, the defects of human governments, by extending its influence to cases and circumstances which human laws cannot reach, and where human sanctions are of no avail.

The great stress which christianity lays upon works of beneficence has undoubtedly prompted the numerous institutions of humanity which abound throughout Christendom. By law, in some of these countries, poverty and sickness receive a regular and general relief; and in all of them, the charity of individuals has formed establishments for the support and comfort of the poor, the unfortunate, the insane, the friendless stranger, the deserted orphan, and many other descriptions of misery. In what part of the modern or of the ancient pagan world will you look for similar institutions? In what heathen country has there been so expensive a display of charity and beneficence?

The christian institutions have also a great effect on the present welfare of mankind. The weekly sabbath, as a day of rest to the laborious part of the community, greatly meliorates the condition of a vast majority in every nation. While it suspends their burdens, it affords them the opportunity and furnishes them with the means of knowledge and virtue. The public worship which christianity ordains on this day, and which is, in some sort, kept up among all professed christians, is a most admirable mean of improvement, not only in knowledge, but in morals and manners. It generates kind affections, strengthens all the principles  
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of association and friendly intercourse, and promotes the reciprocation of those benevolent attentions which form and preserve the happiness of social life.

It is a farther recommendation of our holy religion, that as the knowledge of it is diffused among mankind, it prompts them to learning in general, excites in them a thirst after general knowledge, awakens in them a spirit of inquiry and enterprise, puts them upon exerting all their faculties, and renders them ambitious of improvement in whatever may adorn and dignify human life and manners. The discoveries of the gospel have unquestionably this tendency. In perceiving and believing these divine truths, the mind is roused to the pursuit of truth in general. An appeal to facts will confirm the justness of this observation. The distinction which the European nations possess above all the other nations of the earth, is principally owing to their religion. *The excellency of the knowledge of Christ* has enabled them to excel all the rest of the world in general knowledge, and in whatever is truly excellent. Their general improvements have uniformly kept pace with their proficiency in the knowledge of christianity. When this knowledge was in a great measure lost, during the dark ages which preceded the protestant reformation, all improvement among the European nations seems to have been at a stand. The cloud of general ignorance and stupidity sat thick and heavy over those nations. Such of them as had been formerly distinguished for arts and knowledge, lost that distinction, and sunk to a level with the barbarous nations with which they were blended.

ed. But no sooner did the true knowledge of christianity revive and shine forth, than with it learning in general, and all the arts, began to revive, and to throw a lustre on those favoured nations. And at this day, they universally shine the brightest in those countries where there is the clearest and most general knowledge of religion. Those parts of the earth where christianity is unknown, are still regions of *darkness and habitations of cruelty*. In those parts of Christendom where it is very imperfectly known, the common people, from whom the scriptures are withheld, rise but little above the heathen, being ignorant, weak, credulous, and superstitious. But in those countries where all ranks are trained up in the knowledge of the holy scriptures, and the christian institutions are kept up in their original purity ; there the common people are generally sensible and well informed in various other branches of knowledge. To the salutary influence of the gospel in this respect, we may add

Its tendency to meliorate the civil state of mankind, by letting them into the knowledge of their equal rights, and inspiring them with the true spirit of liberty. From revelation alone do we learn, with certainty, our participation in one common nature, our fraternal relation and reciprocal obligations to one another—our equal relation to the Creator, and equal right to share in the bounties of his Providence, and that every infringement of these rights is contrary to his will. The christian system, rightly understood, promotes a free and manly spirit, teaches men the true dignity of their nature, and begets in them an aversion to every kind of

slavery. It enables them to discern the impropriety and injustice of arbitrary domination, and to love and prize a free and equal government. The most enlightened and best christians have always been the most disinterested and steady patriots. Indeed there can be but little dependence upon the professed patriotism of any others. Amidst all their noisy pretences and great professions, their own interest and private views are generally their ruling principle. But good and enlightened christians, while they are modest in their professions, are prompted by their religion to all the noblest exertions of a true and genuine patriotism. Were the bulk of any nation of this character, there could be but little oppression among them. Whatever the form of their government might be, its administration would proceed in a great measure on the principles of liberty. Their rulers, even though they should be disposed to oppress, would not dare to hazard the attempt. They would find their power more effectually limited by the public opinion, than by any constitutional forms or checks whatever. A respect for the general sense of their people would compel arbitrary princes to govern with mildness and justice. In this way, christianity, though but imperfectly known, has already actually softened the administration of all the despotic governments in Europe; and where it has been best known, it has mended the form of those governments, and communicated to them a portion of freedom. The nations the most grievously oppressed, and among whom tyranny has appeared in its most cruel and sanguinary forms, are either those who have wholly lost, in the rubbish of superstition,

perdition, the spirit of christianity, or who, after renouncing it, have commenced deists and atheists, void of all religion, or those who are blinded by mahometan or pagan darkness. The throne of violence is alike supported by irreligion, ignorance, and superstition. Remove these props, and its fall will be inevitable. Extend the knowledge of the Lord throughout the earth, and you will give liberty to the world—you will communicate the blessings of a free and just government to all nations. Let the gospel *leaven* have its full effect on mankind universally, and there will then be no longer any thing *to hurt or destroy*—no oppression or injustice among the sons of men.

In the description now given of the tendency of christianity, and of its actual effect on the happiness of mankind, I have aimed at a fair statement of facts. Many others might have been particularized, but those adduced amply evince the unspeakable advantages derived to the nations of Christendom from their religion. Previous to their knowledge of the gospel, they, with the rest of their fellow-men, lay in ignorance and wickedness.—Darkness covered the nations, and gross darkness the whole heathen world. All flesh had corrupted their way; polytheism, idolatry, and all the forms of the most impure, stupid, and barbarous superstition degraded and debased the understandings of men, filled their hearts with vile affections, and stained their lives with the foulest vices. They were dead in trespasses and sins. Human wisdom and philosophy had tried, and tried in vain, to provide a remedy. After the experience of a long succession of ages, of some thousands of years, it was

was found that there was none to help. "The world by wisdom knew not God." Such was the deplorable situation of mankind when the gospel-dispensation opened, and its divine author, in the language of ancient prophecy, thus addressed our perishing race—"The spirit of the Lord is upon me—he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor ; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind ; to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." The gospel-leaven, thus imparted, immediately began to diffuse its influence ; and already its effects, in countless instances, have verified this description. To the *poor* in fortune, in spirit, and in understanding, it hath brought glad tidings of great joy. *It hath healed the broken hearted*, by opening to them a source of strong consolation. *It hath strengthened the weak hands, and confirmed the feeble knees.* To the *captives*, and them *bruised* by hard and cruel bondage, whether in a spiritual or civil sense, it hath brought deliverance and liberty. It hath made them the Lord's free-men ; and so humanized the hearts of masters, that, in every christian country, the chains of personal slavery have been gradually loosened, and ultimately broken. To the *blind*, and them who *sat in darkness and in the shadow of death*, it has been the sun of righteousness. To us all, it brings the *acceptable year of the Lord*—a jubilee more welcome than that proclaimed by Moses. Its present temporal advantages exceed all our other enjoyments in this world ; but eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, any thing comparable to its promised rewards hereafter. It

It is hoped, that the consideration of these things may lead us all more firmly to believe and more highly to prize the christian revelation ; but they have been brought into view with a special aim to encourage and animate my fathers and brethren in their arduous work. We are fallen on a period of time, and into circumstances, which render encouragement peculiarly seasonable. We have been forewarned of the approach of times when iniquity should abound, and the love of many should become cold. Into those times we have evidently entered. The cause in which we are engaged, is evilly spoken against. By a strange perversion in the understandings of men, numbers have become prejudiced against a religion infinitely more beneficial to mankind than any other institution that has ever taken place among them. In direct opposition to their present and future well-being, they seem disposed to abandon this religion, and turn their backs on its teachers. Already there are many who will not give us a hearing. They despise our office, and set at naught all our counsel. On every side we hear their defaming, and the hard speeches that are uttered against us. Feeling in ourselves a full persuasion of the truth and importance of the gospel doctrines, we labour to fix this conviction in the minds of those whom custom, complaisance, or any other motive induces to attend on our ministrations ; but after exerting our utmost abilities, to our concern and grief we often find that many of our hearers go away wholly unmoved by what had appeared to us so exceedingly interesting. After repeating these attempts for years together

together with the same ill success, we are in danger of becoming weary and faint in our minds. The messenger of the most important tidings, when he perceives them to be ridiculed by some, and treated with indifference by others, is tempted to cease the publication of them. This, however, must not be our conclusion. Whether men hear or whether they forbear, we must continue to fulfil the charge received from our great Master. It is among the miseries of our apostacy, that men are ignorant of their own mercies, and ungrateful towards their best benefactors. That they should be slow of heart to believe, and reluctant to receive the glad tidings of their salvation, is indeed astonishing :— That after having experienced already such advantages from the gospel-leaven, they should, instead of prizing, be disposed to cast it away as useless, is surely an insult upon the divine mercy. But their heavenly Father, with infinite patience, endures their perverseness. The compassionate Saviour, whose gospel they thus despise, weeps over their obstinacy. Similar emotions of concern and pity we his ministers should also feel towards those who thus slight their heavenly inheritance.

Nor may we be hasty in determining with respect to them, or even with respect to those who contradict and blaspheme, that our labour is wholly in vain. How unpromising foever present appearances may be, yet the seed of heavenly truth, once sown in their understandings, may at length take root in their hearts. After being a long time dormant, it may, on some future occasion, through the influence of that spirit by which it was inspired, begin, like leaven, to work on their temper and affections.

affections. But though no saving effect should be ultimately produced, yet some temporal advantages are universal wherever the gospel is preached. Even they who affect to disbelieve and reject it, are yet unspeakably benefitted by this divine system. There is not a deist in Christendom, however reluctant he may be to acknowledge it, whose mind, after being trained up in the knowledge of the gospel, is not thereby unavoidably enlightened and furnished with ideas in Theology and morals far superior to what the heathen ever attain.

Our labours, therefore, in the gospel ministry are most certainly useful. All our hearers are, in some respect or other, and to a greater or less degree, benefitted by them. While thus employed, we are workers together with God and Christ in promoting the intellectual and moral improvement of mankind. At the same time, by practising what we inculcate upon others, we are working out our own salvation, and preparing for a blessed immortality. Thus we fulfil the great design of our being, serve God and our generation, and put ourselves in readiness for the world of glory.

How many of our fathers and brethren, whom we were once accustomed to meet on these occasions, have already departed for that better country? On each return of the season, we miss some whose countenances formerly gladdened our hearts. So much solid learning, unfeigned piety, and active goodness were withdrawn from among us in the late sudden exit of the amiable CLARKE,\* in the midst of his days and at the height of his usefulness,

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\* The Rev. Dr. JOHN CLARKE, pastor of the First Church in Boston.

ness, that we are constrained, on this anniversary, to weep afresh at the recollection. The Providence, while it admonishes us all of our constant liability to be cut short in our career, and summoned to our final account, loudly calls us, by greater diligence and usefulness, to make up for the common loss.

It is the laudable practice of this convention to close the public solemnity by an expression of our christian sympathy with the surviving families of those among our deceased brethren who have left behind them little or no worldly substance. If, as we have opportunity, we are to do good unto all men, it is especially incumbent upon us to abound in beneficence towards those who are of the household of faith. It will be sufficient to open the hearts and hands of all the friends of religion, and dispose them to give liberally, if we imagine each of those desolate widows, surrounded with her young offspring, now addressing us in the language of a prophet's widow in Israel of old—*Thy servant my husband is dead, and thou knowest that thy servant feared the Lord; and the creditor is come.*



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